



Chronicle of meth's damage changes other lives

CAPE GIRARDEAU, Mo. (AP) - When a former meth addict commissioned a film to document his decline prior to his death, he did so in the hopes that it would help others recognize the ravages of the drug. His blunt approach appears to be paying off.

In the months since Shawn Bridges, 35, died in a Cape Girardeau hospital on March 26, thousands of DVDs of the half-hour documentary have been sold or given away. "No More Sunsets," shot by a former southern Illinois television videographer, takes an unflinching look at the aftermath of Bridges' addiction.

Bridges' troubles began early. Shawn always struggled with the death of his infant brother in a car accident. The wreck happened when Shawn was 4. His parents, trying to ease his grief, may have been too lenient with the boy, said his father, Jack Bridges.

Shawn was a high school dropout at 16, who went from smoking cigarettes to sneaking beer and wine and eventually to marijuana and heavier alcohol use.

Abuse of caffeine pills and pseudoephedrine ultimately turned to a methamphetamine addiction, or "that poison," as his father calls it.

"It takes everything away from everyone who gets on it," Jack Bridges said. Meth use ruined Shawn's heart, so while he kicked his habit, he wasn't able to save his own life. He thought his story could help others.

The "No More Sunsets" project documented by videographer Chip Rosetti shows a gaunt Shawn in a hospital bed, unable to speak as friends and relatives tell about his drug use, his first heart attack at age 26, and his desire that others won't follow the path he traveled.

The project received international attention while Bridges was alive, but continues to find an audience, both as a way to keep children from experimenting with drugs and as a cautionary tale for recovering addicts, some of whom watch it to keep themselves strong against a relapse.

"We're still getting comments from people worldwide," said Jack Bridges. "It so vividly grabs where you're headed if you choose drugs. It's going to take you down the same road."

He said the documentary is being used in counseling centers, in probation departments, in juvenile detention centers.

The success of the project prompted other events. An anti-drug presentation was held for about 250 eighth graders, college students and community members at Shawnee Community College in Ullin, Ill. on Friday. An annual Shawn Bridges Scholarship will be awarded for \$6,000 to the two-year school, said Buddy Walls, a family friend and pastor.

A Web site is being revamped to link people to resources to fight their addictions. On the comments page, dozens write in to say what Shawn's story has meant to them.

Work is also being done to film success stories from those who have successfully beaten drug addictions, with a plan to put out a sequel documentary.

Walls recalls the night he was locking up a church, and Shawn Bridges stopped by, asking to speak with the pastor. Bridges wanted to beat his addiction, but could not at that time. Walls called Shawn's later decision to document his life a courageous one. Not many people, he said, would be comfortable sharing their weaknesses with the world.

Counselors say the DVD brings recovering addicts to tears and sends a powerful message to young people to stay away from drugs.

"People see reality, a real person with family members, dying because of real choices," said Chris Fralish, youth program supervisor at The Fellowship House, a nonprofit in Anna, Ill., that provides treatment, prevention and intervention for adolescents and adults with substance abuse issues.